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A BRIEF CONVERSATION
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
WITH
Rev. William O. White, D. D.
PARENTS
ABOUT THE
BAPTISM OF THEIR CHILDREN

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A BRIEF CONVERSATION
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ABOUT
THE BAPTISM OF THEIR CHILDREN.

PARENTS—We are glad to see you, Mr. ———, for we have long wanted to talk with you about the baptism of our children. We should have attended to the matter sooner, but have felt somewhat unsettled in our views on the subject. Pray explain to us why it is necessary or important that children should be baptized?

MINISTER—I will gladly enlighten you to the best of my ability. And let me begin by asking a simple question by way of illustration. Why do you regard it necessary or important that your children should be washed every day?

PARENTS—Because we are anxious that they should be sweet and clean in their persons.

MINISTER—Baptism is a symbolical washing. God sets before our eyes the water of Baptism in order to intimate to us in the most striking manner that we are defiled with sin, and need to be washed from its stains. When we see this water it is as if we heard a voice: "*And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.*"—(Acts xxii. 16.)

PARENTS—Are our *children* defiled with sin? This little babe in its mother's arms?

MINISTER—"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"—(Job xiv. 4.) You do not hesitate to admit your own sinfulness. Can you then have any doubt about the sinfulness of your children? For "*how can he be clean that is born of a woman?*"—(Job xxv. 4.) Have you forgotten the strong language of the Psalmist: "*Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother*

conceive me."—(Ps. li. 5.) Paul says we are "*by nature the children of wrath*"—(Eph. ii. 3); that is, we are *born* so.

Experience shows the same truth. We find that our children *are* sinful, as soon as we can learn anything about their character at all; and we find that they are subject to death, which is "*the wages of sin.*"—(Rom. vi. 23; v. 12-14; I Cor. xv. 22.)

PARENTS—You cannot mean that all who die in infancy are lost?

MINISTER—Far from it. I do mean, however, that *but for Jesus Christ* they would be lost. They need a Saviour as truly as adults.

PARENTS—We see the matter now more clearly, and it gives us a new view of the fearful character of sin, which can thus taint all human nature and involve a race in ruin. We can admire now also better than ever before the exceeding preciousness of the love and grace of Christ. But for Jesus the very babes would have perished!

MINISTER—You can see, too, that if the

water of Baptism is important in order to impress grown people with a sense of their sin and guilt, it is equally important in order that they may be reminded of the sin and guilt of their offspring.

PARENTS—Yes, how helpful has it been already to us! The call of God to bring our children promptly to the washing has roused us to the consciousness of their moral defilement, which we were ready to have denied.

MINISTER—How delightful, too, that the very thing which teaches us the children's defilement teaches us also the possibility of their cleansing! God seems to say to us in setting this water before us:—"*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.*"—(Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.)

PARENTS—We feel this deeply, and rejoice for the consolation. The real nature of Baptism is now becoming clear to our minds. It is plainly an ordinance in which God

makes a gracious promise to us in view of our children's sin and need, and in which we publicly declare our humble faith in His promise, and our trust in the provision of His grace.

MINISTER—Yes, and you must see that the very first thing required of those that would bring their children to Baptism is a consciousness that they are really *sinful, guilty* and *polluted*, together with a willingness to make public acknowledgment of this fact. Confession of sin is required as essential to pardon and cleansing.—(1 John i. 9.) If, therefore, you desire to bring your children to be baptized, you must first consider whether you are prepared for this act of self-humiliation; for your children are part and parcel of yourselves.

PARENTS—We are indeed prepared. We are ready from the heart to say before God: "These children are born in *our own likeness and after our image*"—(Gen. v. 3): "sinners as we are sinners: heirs of wrath by nature as we were heirs of wrath."—(Eph. ii. 3.)

MINISTER—There is still something else which you must confess besides the children's sinful condition. It is *your own helplessness to deliver them from it*. Do you feel prepared for that?

PARENTS—Perhaps not quite. We hoped our efforts might be of some avail. We teach our children the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Shorter Catechism. We are very particular with them, and punish them when they are in fault.

MINISTER—All this is excellent in its place. But training can never change the nature of a child. It cannot open blind eyes. It cannot make the dead live. Your children are spiritually blind; nay, *dead* in trespasses and sins.—(Eph. ii. 1.) If human training is all that can be done for them they must perish. That which they require only divine power can afford. They need "*a new heart.*" They must be "*born again.*"

PARENTS—How great has our folly been!

We knew that we could not make alive our own souls; but we have been singularly slow to perceive that we were equally dependent upon the power and grace of God for the salvation of the children. We have really been trusting in our own works. Now we perceive that all is vain unless the soul is renewed. For such a work as that we are indeed helpless. God alone can change the heart.

MINISTER—If God alone can change the heart, and if you are thus entirely dependent upon His grace in this matter, you must feel anxious to know whether He has made any promise on which your faith and hope may rest.

PARENTS—Did not the Apostle Peter say: "*The promise is unto you, and to your children?*"—(Acts ii. 39.)

MINISTER—He did, and with good reason, for God's covenants with his people have always included their children. You will find it so in the covenant made with Adam after the Fall—(Gen. iii. 15); in the cove-

nant with Noah—(Gen. ix. 9); in the covenant with Abraham—(Gen. xiii. 15). On this account the children of Abraham from generation to generation have received circumcision, the seal of the covenant, in their early infancy.—(Gen. xvii. 12, 13.)

PARENTS—Can we be sure that this gracious provision is extended to the children of believers under the New Testament?

MINISTER—Do you not know that the way in which we are saved is by being adopted into Abraham's family?—(Rom. iv. 16; Gal. iii. 29.) The provisions of God's covenant with Abraham were that He would be a GOD to him and to his seed; and the provisions of this covenant are simply extended to us. The covenant is certainly not narrower under the New Testament than under the Old: "else were our children unclean; *but now are they holy.*"—(1 Cor. vii. 14.)

PARENTS—What must we do then in order that we may secure God's gracious promise to be a God to our children?

MINISTER—You must do as Abraham did. You must *believe* God.—(Gen. xv. 6.) As you have confessed that you cannot depend upon your own exertions, you must humbly put your trust in His gracious promise of which you have spoken.

PARENTS—Yes, plainly, we must cast our children at Jesus' feet, like the man who brought to Jesus his son that from a child was possessed of a demon. We must cry out as he did, "*If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*"—(Mark ix. 17, 22.)

MINISTER—That would not be faith, but on the contrary doubt and unbelief. You must rather say, as he afterwards did: "*Lord, we believe; help Thou our unbelief.*"—(vs. 24.)

PARENTS—We will try to do so, and strive ever to deal with our children in humble dependence upon His grace and power. But be pleased to tell us what effect, if any, follows Baptism?

MINISTER—The water of Baptism is God's token or pledge, given to assure us that He has indeed undertaken to be a God to the children, and to save them from destruction; just as the rainbow was made His token or pledge in the days of Noah that He would preserve the world from another flood.—(Gen. ix. 11-16.)

PARENTS—The effect of Baptism then is to bind *Him* and to assure *us*. But is nothing further required of us?

MINISTER—You have already learned the necessity of an humble confession of your children's guilt and pollution, and of your own helplessness in the case; also the need of heartfelt trust in the promise of God. What follows is the fruit of this humble faith. Real faith always shows itself in appropriate works. In this case, if you are true believers, you will be eager to see the effect of God's intervention. You will early *teach the children* the truth of Christ, expecting to find them ready to embrace it. If there is delay in the bestowal of God's

gifts of grace, you will eagerly *pray* that they may be quickly given. If the children appear to be careless, or wander into sin, you will anxiously remonstrate with God, and *plead the terms of the covenant*, and remind Him of the pledge He gave in Baptism. If the children are disobedient, you will *use the rod of a holy discipline*, humbly depending upon the promise of God to give it efficacy.—(Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.)

Thus you see that, while faith is the condition on which God covenants with you in Baptism for the salvation of your children, works follow as the evidence that the faith you possess is genuine and sincere. If you neglect *teaching*, and *prayer*, and *discipline*, and, I will add, *a holy example*, you may well doubt whether you have ever been in covenant with God at all for your children's souls; whether their Baptism was more than an empty form.

PARENTS—You have set the whole matter clearly before us. We know no other hope for our dear children in all the world but

the hope of God's intervention by His Holy Spirit. That needed intervention we understand He offers us by bringing forth the water of Baptism. We shall bring our children to that sacred washing in token that we acknowledge their need of cleansing, and that we humbly trust God's kindly offer to take away their sin; and we shall closely watch our lives to see that we give evidence of a sincere faith, by a constant attendance upon the duties of which you have spoken.